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GRANT FORECASTS THE FUTURE OF FLORIDA

edited by JAMES P. JONES

THROUGHOUT 1878 AND 1879 Americans followed ex-President Ulysses S. Grant's world tour. At the same time, Republican "Stalwart" leaders launched the "Grant for President" boom. In September, 1879, to the distress of his friends, Grant landed in California and began a slow procession across the country.¹ While the tide seemed to be running in Grant's favor when he returned to the United States, his supporters sensed a turn for the worse as Grant crossed the country. Senator John A. Logan, a Grant man, wrote Elihu B. Washburne that the "reception business" was being overdone, and its continuance would benefit the Blaine forces in the Republican Party.² By Christmas, the Grant promoters had become convinced that Grant's continued presence in the country would ruin his chances for the nomination. As a last resort these men talked Grant into making a trip to Cuba and Mexico.³

Grant agreed with this plan and on December 30, accompanied by his wife, son, daughter-in-law, and General and Mrs. Philip Sheridan, he began his trip south.⁴ The party passed through Charlotte, Columbia, and Savannah, and were cordially greeted everywhere they stopped. On January 4, Grant and his friends arrived in Fernandina where they were welcomed to Florida by ex-Senator David L. Yulee.⁵ On the eighth the party attended a banquet with Florida's Governor Drew in Jacksonville. On the following day they began a journey down the St. Johns and Ocklawaha Rivers.

The Florida Democratic press greeted Grant as an honorable opponent who deserved a cordial welcome.⁶ The Republican

1. William B. Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant, Politician* (New York, 1935), 431.

2. John A. Logan to Elihu B. Washburne, December 18, 1879, Washburne, Mss., Library of Congress.

3. Hesseltine, *op. cit.*, 435.

4. *Sunland Tribune* (Tampa), January 8, 1880.

5. *New York Times*, January 5, 1880.

6. *Sunland Tribune*, January 15, 1880.

press, on the other hand, welcomed Grant as the man who, "may be our next President."⁷

Grant's brief trip through Florida was a pleasant one. While the North endured freezing weather, Florida basked in 80° temperature, and Grant began to see possibilities for Florida's future development.⁸ While sailing down the Ocklawaha, Grant voiced his optimism in this regard to a fellow passenger who reported it to the press.⁹ By the time he arrived in St. Augustine on January 18, Grant's interest in the state was clearly evident as he wrote his old friend Washburne. In a letter prophetic of Florida's future Grant wrote:¹⁰

My Dear Mr. Washburne,

I wrote you a hasty letter from Phila[delphia] but do not know whether you received it. Our trip through the South has been so far without an incident to mar the pleasure of it. All the way from Washington the people of all classes and colors were at the stations to meet the train and to extend invitations for myself and party to stop and accept their hospitalities. The business boom has reached the South and the people are beginning to feel much better contented in consequence. I am very much pleased with Florida. The winter climate is perfection, and, I am told by Northern men settled here, that the summers are not near so hot as in the North, though of longer continuance. This state has a great future before it. It has the capacity to raise all the sugar and semitropical fruits the whole country needs, besides supplying vast amounts of timber, early vegetables, rice, material for paper, rope, baging [sic] coarse matting & c. It affords the best opening to be found in any country for young men of little means but full of energy, industry and patience. The impetus already given will supply in a few years all the semi-tropical fruits required by the country. What is now wanted is the establishment of moderate sugar mills over the country to buy all this sugar cane small farmers will furnish. The state is underlayed and has around it deposits of valuable fertilizers sufficient for many generations. If you do not join me in Cuba, I hope you will come back here to spend March and Ap[ri]l. I do not doubt but you would receive much benefit from the visit.

I will sail from Cedar Key for Havana on the 20th. The Sec.

7. Tampa *Guardian*, January 10, 1880.

8. New York *Times*, January 5, 1880.

9. *Sunland Tribune*, January 22, 1880.

10. Ulysses S. Grant to Elihu B. Washburne, January 18, February 20, 1880, Grant Mss., Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield.

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of the Navy has placed at Havana a vessel at my command. With kindest regards. . . . I am.

Very truly,
U. S. Grant

On February 20, from Havana, Grant wrote Washburne:

The weather is sultry, just such as we run from at home in the Dog Days. If this winter is a sample, Fla. is a much better winter resort.